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ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 180746Z NOV 08

FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2352

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0021

RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0377

RHMFSS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KHARTOUM 001683

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C

NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

TRIPOLI FOR CANDINO

DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2009

TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC SOCI KPKO KDEM AU SU CD

SUBJECT: A/S FRAZER'S MEETING WITH TOP SPLM OFFICIALS ON
NORMALIZATION OF SUDAN-CHAD RELATIONS, FINDING PEACE IN
DARFUR, AND SUDANESE ELECTIONS

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1593

1B. KHARTOUM 1589

1C. KHARTOUM 1531

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alberto Fernandez, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Top Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) officials Secretary General Pagan Amum and Deputy Secretary Yasir Arman told Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer on 3 November that they had just returned from a productive visit to Ndjamena to meet with Chadian President Idris Deby. They believe that relations can be normalized between Sudan and Chad, but for this to happen, Sudan must change its policy towards Chad, and Chadian President Deby needs to play a more active role in helping to solve the problem of Darfur. Arman's and Amum's visit was also intended to pave the way for GNU First Vice President, Government of Southern Sudan President, and SPLM Chairman Salva Kiir Mayardit to travel to Ndjamena sometime in the next week or two to meet with Deby to discuss practical steps for improving the Sudan-Chad relationship. Arman and Amum also met with influential Darfur rebel leader Khalil Ibrahim of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and encouraged him, as well as leaders of the United Resistance Front (URF), to contact the Government of Qatar on the Qatari Initiative and to participate in upcoming negotiations. The SPLM officials claimed that Chadian President Deby holds the key to convincing Darfur rebel groups, with the exception of the Sudan Liberation Movement - Abdel Wahid Al-Nur, to attend the negotiations. They encouraged the USG to engage with Deby more actively and to persuade him to play more of a role in solving the Darfur crisis. END SUMMARY.

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IMPROVING SUDAN-CHAD RELATIONS

12. (C) On 3 November, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer met with Secretary General of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Pagan Amum Okiech and Deputy Secretary General of the SPLM for the Northern Sector Yasir Arman. Amum and Arman, who just returned from what they characterized as a "well received" visit to Chad to meet with Chadian President Idris Deby, told A/S Frazer that they have paved the way for Government of National Unity (GNU)

First Vice President, Government of southern Sudan President, and SPLM Chairman Salva Kiir Mayardit to travel to Ndjamena sometime in the next week or two to meet with Deby to discuss the normalization of relations between Sudan and Chad.

¶3. (C) As the NCP has allowed the SPLM to play more of a role in recent weeks to facilitate the effort to improve Sudan-Chad relations, the SPLM has made it clear to key NCP players, such as influential presidential advisor Nafie Ali Nafie and National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) chief Salah Ghosh, that solving the Sudan-Chad rift is instrumental to realizing peace in Darfur and that the GoS must change its policy towards Chad if bilateral relations are to improve. Amum said that the SPLM has been extremely transparent with the NCP on its discussions with the Chadians, which the NCP has "appreciated."

¶4. (C) According to Amum, "the Chadians aren't confident there is change in Khartoum," particularly with the latest indication that Chadian rebels have gathered in Khartoum to discuss another attack on Chad (ref A). "They have a plan, these rebels," said Arman. "We believe they will try to take a major town in Eastern Chad, and then use it as a bargaining chip with the Government of Chad (GoC)," he added. The GoC and GoS had agreed to restart diplomatic relations by exchanging ambassadors (an initiative sponsored by Libya), but this has been postponed twice (most recently on 3 November) by President Deby, said Arman. Arman believes that Deby postponed the exchange because of the "recent signs" of plotting Chadian rebels in Khartoum. In response, Deby has sent a significant number of GoC troops to Eastern Chad. "Deby is prepared this time," said Arman. "He has a lot of weapons and he has fortified Ndjamena by building a dike around the city. He has strengthened his defenses in

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Ndjamena so as to tightly restrict the movement of cars into the city. Such tactics work in Africa," joked Arman. "When a dike is built, rebels cannot cross it. Despite this," said Amum, "we believe that relations between Sudan and Chad can be normalized." Sudan will have to change its policy towards Chad, and the GoS should be motivated to do so because it is in its interest to achieve peace in Darfur, he continued.

¶5. (C) Arman and Amum both emphasized that Deby's leverage in being able to restrain negative actions by the Justice and Equality Movement's (JEM's) Khalil Ibrahim and encourage rebel factions to attend negotiations with the GoS should not be underestimated. Deby will do anything in order to keep his seat (of power), said Arman. He is ready to exercise control over Khalil Ibrahim. Deby has significant leverage, and the Chadians are "organic" to the situation in Darfur more so than any other player, continued Arman. The only significant Darfur rebel leader that Deby does not have leverage with is the Sudanese Liberation Movement's (SLM's) Abdel Wahid Al-Nur. Despite that, Abdel Wahid has been sending messages to Deby, and they are in communication. Deby is important to finding a solution for peace in Darfur because peace helps him stabilize his own regime. Arman noted that Libya is also a "big part of the game" when it comes to the normalization of Sudan-Chad relations and finding a solution to the conflict in Darfur. "We must bring them on board," he said. "While they publicly say they support the Qatari Initiative, it makes them nervous. Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi wants to be the one who solves problems that are in his own backyard."

¶6. (C) Although it will have to be discussed with their NCP partners, the SPLM hopes that during his visit to Chad, Kiir will be able to explain to Deby steps that Khartoum would take to avoid the destabilization of the Chadian regime. In return, Kiir will seek to get commitment from Deby to support the peace process in Sudan, including weighing in with key rebel factions such as JEM's Khalil Ibrahim.

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SPLM'S DISCUSSIONS WITH DARFUR'S MILITARILY STRONGEST REBEL
GROUP - JEM
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¶7. (C) During their trip West, Amum and Arman also met with the leader of the group JEM led by Khalil Ibrahim. JEM has been supported heavily by Chadian President Deby's regime (as well as other nations and even Islamic extremist groups) - making it the strongest Darfur rebel faction militarily - and the one that led the May 10, 2008 attack on Omdurman. Amum and Arman also met with the United Resistance Front (URF) - not a major player in the Darfur conflict, but involved in the SPLM's efforts to unify some of the Darfur factions over the past year in Juba. "We discussed with them how best to bring an end to the war through negotiations," said Amum. "We also discussed the Qatari Initiative and encouraged them to participate and attend the Initiative should it go forward. The rebel leaders told the SPLM officials that they had not yet been invited by the Qatars to attend negotiations. We encouraged them to proactively contact the Qatars and ask them about the process and how it will be carried out," said Amum. "After our visit, JEM issued a statement iterating that it would contact the Qatars to discuss the initiative." Amum mentioned that the SPLM team also visited Sudanese refugee camps in Eastern Chad. "There is a lot of bitterness against the NCP (in these camps), and it is a serious issue," said Amum. "These refugees believe that Bashir should not only go to the Hague, but also to Hell," he quipped.

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QATARI INITIATIVE
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¶8. (C) "How do you feel about the Qatari Initiative?," asked Amum of A/S Frazer (ref B). A/S Frazer responded that the US has been neutral. "At first we were concerned that UN-AU Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole would not be in the lead, and we did not want to see a parallel track established. It's

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fine for us if the GoS, through the Sudan People's Initiative (SPI) and the Qatari Initiative, is trying to tie together all of the initiatives. What we want to see," she continued, "is for the GoS to form a good position going into negotiations." Arman mentioned that GNU First Vice President Salva Kiir met with the Qatars to discuss the Initiative. He emphasized that there should be: (1) no link between the potential ICC indictment of GNU President Al-Bashir and the Qatari Initiative, (2) Bassole should be able to play his role as the chief mediator in any type of negotiations, and (3) that there should be a forum in order to bring Sudan's neighboring countries together so that they can play more active role with the Qatars in the development of the initiative.

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ELECTIONS, YOU SAY?
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¶9. (C) A/S Frazer asked Amum and Arman about whether GNU FVP Kiir would run for the GNU presidency in upcoming elections. As has been the case in USG meetings with the SPLM in which this has been raised over the past few months, Amum and Arman were intentionally coy and vague about the prospect of Kiir's national candidacy. Arman highlighted the serious issue of the need for reform of key legislation - such as the press and security laws. The Speaker of the Parliament has said he will dissolve Parliament after the current session (which ends in late December 2008) in order to prepare for and hold elections, which means that there is no time to reform these critical laws before elections. Arman asked A/S Frazer to have the USG issue a public statement of USG concern about this issue.

¶10. (C) Amum told A/S Frazer that at the earliest, elections could be held in April or May of 2009. At the latest, they

could be held in November of 2009. Decisions on electoral timing should be based on technical factors and decided by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) when the Commission is established. "This should be a technical decision, not a political one," he said. As far as progress on naming the NEC goes, Amum repeated what US Embassy Khartoum officials have heard and reported repeatedly, that the delay stems from the refusal of would-be Chairman (Abel Alier) and Deputy Chairman (Abdulla Idris) to accept the positions (ref C). "It is very difficult to find replacements for these two individuals," said Amum. "Although Alier and Idris have cited old age as the reason for turning down the appointments, we believe that behind it all, they think it will be a 'weighty responsibility to hold elections in such a short period of time.'" Arman added that there are other major issues which are likely to negatively affect the elections, such as the announcement of census results, the possibility of an ICC indictment of Al-Bashir, and lack of peace in Darfur. "If an indictment is levied against Al-Bashir, it creates a very serious problem in that he will be delegitimized and will insist on being in the most secure place: the Presidency. Although the elections date is up in the air, the SPLM has to prepare for the fact that elections will take place on time," said Amum. "Our candidates should be ready to run in April or May of 2009 and win the majority." The NCP's agenda is destabilization, said Amum. The SPLM's New Sudan Project is the only one that can bring stability to Sudan. It will guarantee the right of southerners to vote in the 2011 referendum on southern secession and it makes unity attractive.

HOW THE USG CAN HELP

¶11. (C) A/S Frazer told Arman and Amum that the USG is extremely supportive of its efforts to enhance Sudan-Chad relations and work with different parties to resolve the conflict in Darfur. If the GoS can take a step forward in its policy towards Chad, that would be good for peace in Darfur. She asked Amum and Arman how best the USG could help to further the GNU's positive initiatives. It would be very useful if Chadian President Deby gets more support, particularly from the USG, said Arman. Deby is "ready and open" to discuss Sudan-Chad and Darfur issues with the USG.

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He is not comfortable with the Libyans, but he will work with them when confronted with a formidable Sudanese threat, continued Arman. "We encourage you to engage directly with the GoC and encourage Chad to play a more active role in solving the problem of Darfur. Encourage Deby to visit Qatar and talk about the initiative." Secondly, Amum asked that the USG publicly express its support for Salva Kiir's initiative to bring about peace in Darfur and normalize Sudan-Chad relations. Charge d'Affaires Alberto Fernandez said that this is a good idea, and assured the SPLM officials that the USG would issue a press statement on it.

COMMENT

¶12. The SPLM's engagement with the Chadians, as well as key Darfur rebels, is encouraging and sets the stage for future progress on the stabilization of Sudan-Chad relations, as well as resolving the Darfur conflict, if the NCP and the Chadians are serious in moving forward on such issues. The fact that the NCP agreed to the SPLM mission to Chad to meet with Deby and Khalil Ibrahim shows to a certain extent that the regime is flexible (and somewhat desperate) in its current approach to negotiations, but even more so it shows that the regime urgently needs to keep the SPLM close at hand and fully engaged in the GNU in the face of a probable ICC warrant for Bashir's arrest. Arman and Amum's assessment that Chadian President Deby is key to persuading rebel groups, such as JEM, URF and others, to participate in the Qatari Initiative is likely correct, and it is worth Chief

Mediator Bassole's time (and the Qatari Foreign Minister's time) to engage more deeply with President Deby. While the Darfur peace process shows some signs of movement, Sudan's electoral process is currently stalled. With no NEC in place and a lack of NCP-SPLM agreement on the need to reform key laws which would enable more fair, credible elections to take place, Sudan's "democratic transformation" appears to be in a holding pattern at best. End Comment.

¶13. (U) A/S Frazer's party had the opportunity to review this message before transmission.

FERNANDEZ